

Ringling and migration at Ngulia, Tsavo, autumn 1990

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This, the 19th season of thorough coverage at Ngulia, resulted in the highest catch of birds in a year so far: 17 007 Palaearctic migrants and 252 Afrotropical birds were ringed. Recoveries and controls from the season's activities stand at five at the time of going to press (July 1992).

Ngulia Safari Lodge was manned on 26 nights during the two 'small moon' late autumn periods, from 14 to 28 November and from 11 to 23 December. Only six nights, three in each period, were clear. Otherwise, apart from 15 December when cloud failed

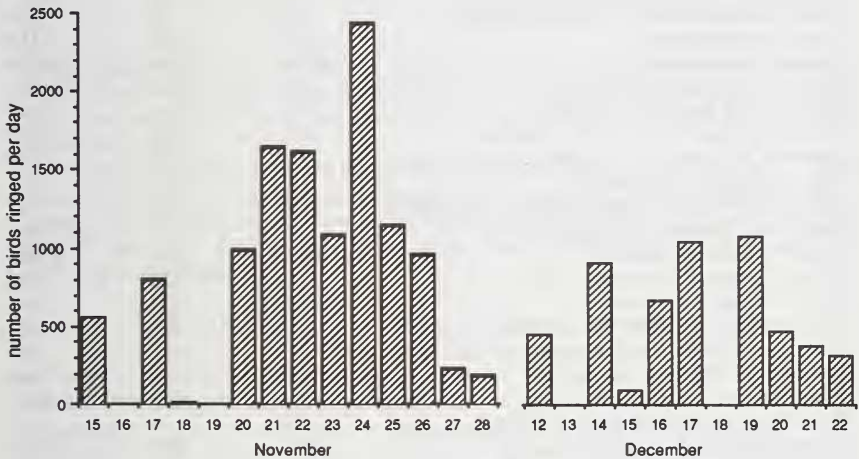


Figure 1. Showing the number of Palaearctic migrants ringed each day at Ngulia, autumn 1990

to descend, the remaining nights were all misty, and most produced large catches of migrants (Fig. 1). Weather conditions were particularly ideal during November when just a few light showers occurred on most nights. In December, however, showers were often heavy, and netting was more often curtailed. Falls were never really exceptional by Ngulia standards, though on eight November mornings and five in December, numbers grounded within a few hundred metres of the Lodge ran to several thousands.

Twenty-five people from four countries took part in operations, and the presence of many experienced ringers allowed us to set three 18-m mist-nets almost every night, and to run two ringing 'stations' at busy times. Moreover, nets in the bush could be opened promptly at dawn while processing of the night catch continued at full pace. The highest number of migrants ever ringed at Ngulia in a 24-h period was 2432 on 24 November, considerably higher than the previous best of 1868 set on 28 November 1989 (Backhurst & Pearson 1991). Catches in the bush accounted for some 25 per cent

Table 1. Numbers of Palaearctic night migrants ringed at Ngulia Safari Lodge from December 1969 to December 1990 (between October and February each season)

Species	1990/91 total	%†	Total 1969– Dec 1990
Corncrake <i>Crex crex</i>	1	—	9
Black and White Cuckoo <i>Clamator jacobinus</i>	41	408	223
Asian Lesser Cuckoo <i>Cuculus poliocephalus</i>	2	—	4
Scops Owl <i>Otus scops</i>	1	—	6
Eurasian Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	67	459	330
Eurasian Roller <i>Coracias garrulus</i>	13	459	66
Eurasian Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	29	358	175
Golden Oriole <i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	1	106	19
Rufous Bush Chat <i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>	38	78	926
Irania <i>Irania gutturalis</i>	412	438	2116
Sprosser <i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	4399	395	24534
Nightingale <i>L. megarhynchos</i>	95	284	698
Rock Thrush <i>Monticola saxatilis</i>	33	396	183
Isabelline Wheatear <i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	19	380	109
Northern Wheatear <i>O. oenanthe</i>	24	335	153
Pied Wheatear <i>O. pleschanka</i>	11	374	64
Great Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	10	486	47
Basra Reed Warbler <i>A. griseldis</i>	62	141	855
Marsh Warbler <i>A. palustris</i>	5627	288	40966
Sedge Warbler <i>A. schoenobaenus</i>	11	230	97
Reed Warbler <i>A. scirpaceus</i>	8	203	80
Upcher's Warbler <i>Hippolais languida</i>	43	234	377
Olive-tree Warbler <i>H. olivetorum</i>	60	327	393
Olivaceous Warbler <i>H. pallida</i>	60	226	469
River Warbler <i>Locustella fluviatilis</i>	483	269	3735
Wood Warbler <i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	3	—	7
Willow Warbler <i>P. trochilus</i>	237	263	1863
Blackcap <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	4	120	64
Garden Warbler <i>S. borin</i>	84	255	681
Whitethroat <i>S. communis</i>	4612	296	32804
Barred Warbler <i>S. nisoria</i>	63	181	696
Spotted Flycatcher <i>Muscicapa striata</i>	206	502	946
Tree Pipit <i>Anthus trivialis</i>	2	133	29
Red-backed Shrike <i>Lanius collurio</i>	114	228	1016
Red-tailed Shrike <i>L. isabellinus</i>	131	312	894
Hybrid <i>L. collurio</i> x <i>L. isabellinus</i>	1	—	12
Number of species	35		32
Total ringed	17007		115423

†The autumn 1990 total expressed as a percentage of the mean of the 18 years 1972–1973 to 1989–1990 for each species.

Footnote to Table 1

Totals of Palaearctic species ringed in previous autumn seasons but not in autumn 1990 are as follows:

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus m. minutus* 4, Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* 1, Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora* 1, Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* 1, Great Snipe *Gallinago media* 1, Eurasian Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* 2, Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* 6, Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* 3, Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* 3, Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* 2, Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* 1, Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* 1, Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* 3.

From December 1969 a total of 115 676 Palaearctic night-migrating birds of 48 species (plus one hybrid) has been ringed at Ngulia during southward passage between October and February inclusive.

of the birds ringed in November and almost 35 per cent in December. One hundred and eighty metres of mist-net were normally used in twelve sites. The highest bush catch, 574, was made on 17 December, after a night with very heavy showers which persisted until after dawn.

The Marsh Warbler¹ regained its usual position as the most-ringed species (cf. 1989–90), followed by Whitethroat and Sprosser, and with River Warbler (483 ringed), as usual, in fourth position. In view of the high overall total ringed, it was not surprising that the numbers of all minor species (apart from the Rufous Bush Chat) were well above average (Table 1).

Table 2. Recoveries and controls reported by July 1992 from the 1990 autumn Ngulia ringing

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

Radolfzell	1	20.06.89	Schmellnricht, Germany , 49°08N, 11°20E
BX27952	v	16.12.90	Ngulia, 3°00S, 38°13E. Elapsed time 213 d, great circle distance 6305 km
Bruxelles	3	30.07.90	Floriffoux, Belgium , 50°27N, 4°46E
3-651199	v	26.11.90	Ngulia, 119 d, 6720 km
Stockholm	3	26.08.90	Sotemosse, Skåne, Sweden , 55°26N, 13°25E
AZ66200	v	01.09.90	Sotemosse
	v	25.11.90	Ngulia, 91 d and 85 d, 6865 km
Stockholm	3	26.11.90	Ngulia
BA56927	X (cat)	c.15.05.91	Ras Tanura, Saudi Arabia , 26°41N, 50°11E, c. 170 d, 3525 km.

Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Stockholm	3	22.11.90	Ngulia
BA53268	X (car)	23.06.91	Neftegorsk district, near Kuybyshev, Russia , 52°40N, 51°13E., 213 d, 6305 km.

¹Scientific names are given in Tables 1 and 3

Recoveries and controls from the season's work reported so far are given in Table 2. There were also two retraps of Palaearctic birds ringed at Ngulia in previous seasons: an Olivaceous Warbler ringed on 26 November 1989 and retrapped on 20 November 1990, and a Garden Warbler ringed on 5 January 1990, retrapped 16 December 1990.

Stockholm Museum rings were used this season on all Palaearctics ringed at Ngulia. The purpose of this experiment was to see if recovery rates increased compared with those obtained using our normal 'Inform Museum Nairobi' rings. We have found that some recoveries, with the *ring* number written on the envelope, are mis-sorted to the post office box number of the ring number. We know that this has happened at least twice because the 'ring number box renter' has forwarded the recovery. What we do *not* know is how many recoveries have been misdirected in this way. The use of Stockholm-addressed rings is an attempt to test whether we have been losing a significant number of recoveries. However, there are other factors controlling whether recoveries are a) ever reported in the first place and b) if they are, whether they reach the relevant ringing authority. For instance, a killer of small birds in the Middle East may be more inclined to report a ring from an exotic place such as Nairobi than from a European address to which he or his friends have written many times.

Afrotropical species

Very few Afrotropical birds are associated with the massive southerly movement of Palaearctic species at Ngulia. The most numerous are the Harlequin Quail and various nightjars. Other species, including known Afrotropical migrants, have occurred over the years only in minute numbers, suggesting that their main migrations are at different times of year, that they take place mainly away from Ngulia or that they occur by day. It is also conceivable, though unlikely, that some Afrotropical species pass over Ngulia at night during the autumn but are not attracted down to an appreciable extent.

The immature Ashy Flycatcher caught during morning netting in the bush on 24 November was the first record for the area and the two Pygmy Kingfishers (noinstate race), also caught in the bush on 23 and 24 November were new too. The Red-capped Robin Chat caught at night on 15 November was only the second record (the previous example had also been caught at night) and the Singing Bush Lark, caught at night on 20 November was the first example since 1983. The usual owl seen at Ngulia is Verreaux's Eagle Owl *Bubo lacteus*, but it has never been ringed; Barn Owls are seldom seen but one was caught twice (and ringed) on 22 December this year. A list of Afrotropical birds caught during this season is given in Table 3.

Table 3. *Afrotropical species ringed at Ngulia during the 1990 autumn. At least some examples of birds printed in bold type have been caught at night*

Species/totals:	1990/91	1969-91
Dwarf Bittern <i>Ixobrychus sturmii</i>	1	3
Harlequin Quail <i>Coturnix delegorguei</i>	51	1131
Namaqua Dove <i>Oena capensis</i>	1	12
Laughing Dove <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	10	69
Didric Cuckoo <i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>	1	159
White-browed Coucal <i>Centropus superciliosus</i>	1	6
Barn Owl <i>Tyto alba</i>	1	1

Species/totals:	1990/91	1969-91
Slender-tailed Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus clarus</i>	4	58
Donaldson-Smith's Nightjar <i>C. donaldsoni</i>	9	159
Dusky Nightjar <i>C. fraenatus</i>	10	50
Plain Nightjar <i>C. inornatus</i>	31	162
Grey-headed Kingfisher <i>Halcyon leucocephala</i>	7	26
Pygmy Kingfisher <i>Ispidina p. picta</i>	2	2
Red-fronted Tinkerbird <i>Pogoniulus pusillus</i>	1	2
Red and Yellow Barbet <i>Trachyphonus erythrocephalus</i>	1	18
Black-throated Honeyguide <i>Indicator indicator</i>	2	6
Lesser Honeyguide <i>I. minor</i>	3	21
Cardinal Woodpecker <i>Denropicos fuscescens</i>	1	3
Singing Bush Lark <i>Mirafra cantillans</i>	1	9
Rufous Chatterer <i>Turdoides rubiginosus</i>	1	20
Black Cuckoo Shrike <i>Campephaga flava</i>	4	15
Zanzibar Sombre Greenbul <i>Andropadus importunus</i>	3	12
Common Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	19	57
White-browed Scrub Robin <i>Cercotrichas leucophrys</i>	1	24
Red-capped Robin Chat <i>Cossypha natalensis</i>	1	2
Grey-backed Camaroptera <i>Camaroptera brachyura</i>	6	37
Grey Wren Warbler <i>C. simplex</i>	1	27
Rattling Cisticola <i>Cisticola chiniana</i>	1	36
Winding Cisticola <i>C. galactotes</i>	1	3
Tawny-flanked Prinia <i>Prinia subflava</i>	1	14
Ashy Flycatcher <i>Muscicapa caerulescens</i>	1	1
Gambaga Flycatcher <i>M. gambagae</i>	1	4
Paradise Flycatcher <i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>	2	13
Black-backed Puffback <i>Dryoscopus cubla</i>	2	9
Slate-coloured Boubou <i>Laniarius funebris</i>	3	15
Grey-headed Bush Shrike <i>Malaconotus blanchoti</i>	2	3
Three-streaked Bush Shrike <i>Tchagra jamesi</i>	2	15
Black-headed Tchagra <i>T. senegala</i>	2	15
Wattled Starling <i>Creatophora cinerea</i>	3	26
Superb Starling <i>Spreo superbus</i>	1	4
Collared Sunbird <i>Anthreptes collaris</i>	3	7
Amethyst Sunbird <i>Nectarinia amethystina</i>	1	19
Variable Sunbird <i>N. venusta</i>	3	14
Abyssinian White-eye <i>Zosterops abyssinica</i>	11	34
White-winged Widowbird <i>Euplectes albonotatus</i>	2	12
Masked Weaver <i>Ploceus intermedius</i>	1	16
Chestnut Weaver <i>P. rubiginosus</i>	3	72
Red-billed Quelea <i>Quelea quelea</i>	1	34
Crimson-rumped Waxbill <i>Estrilda rhodopyga</i>	1	10
Jameson's Firefinch <i>Lagonosticta rhodopareia</i>	5	34
Green-winged Pytilia <i>Pytilia melba</i>	8	90
Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu <i>Uraeginthus bengalus</i>	8	59
Purple Grenadier <i>U. ianthinogaster</i>	6	7
Somali Golden-breasted Bunting <i>Emberiza poliopleura</i>	2	23
Yellow-rumped Seed-eater <i>Serinus atrogularis</i>	1	6
Total	252	2686

In addition, 517 individuals of a further 80 Afrotropical species have been ringed in previous autumn seasons at Ngulia, making a total, when added to those listed above of 3203 individuals of 137 species.

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